

SETTING FORTH



Photo: boatsdepot.com

The early missionaries were sent forth from the shores of Ireland in small coracles. They set forth in their little boats to proclaim the gospel to unknown lands. They had no maps, no compass, no life-jacket. The legend goes that they placed their ears to the floor of the coracle and listened to the current of the sea which led them to safe shores beyond their imagining.

As we gather to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost this year, it feels as though there is an urgency for us as we emerge from the challenges of Covid-19. As we begin to gather in our parish communities, there is something comforting about our ability to return and to be with familiar friends and members of our community. We feel reassured as we celebrate the Eucharist and immerse ourselves in the sacramental life of the Church. However, while it feels the same, something is different: WE are different.

As we think back over the long closure and endless weeks of on-line Masses, our parishes have changed as we stand 1.5 metres apart, no longer express our peace in the customary manner, no longer share the Cup of Life as we look for the faces of so many who have not at this time taken their usual pew among us.

Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church. The Acts of the Apostles reflects the joy, unity, harmony and mission which the early Christian community experienced as they 'heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven.' (Acts 2:2) Something new was happening as the Spirit of God called them from Jerusalem to be sent to the ends of the earth. Their witness and testimony, as they shared the 'marvels' of God, inspired in them a power to go forth: to go beyond their known reality, to venture into the world beyond, to proclaim the Risen Christ. Their joy, unity, harmony and mission reverberates in the Church today in the lives of all the baptised who continue to live and discover anew this same gift of the Holy Spirit who falls upon us.

As I move among the parishes of the Diocese of Sale, I see and hear the unique and dynamic stories that are inspired from within our communities. It is not a matter of numbers, but rather one of the sense of communion-communio which exists among people of faith.

In 2019 the Diocese of Sale gathered for the Assembly around the theme, ***Sharing our Story – Celebrating our Faith – Shaping our Future***. Archbishop Pat O'Regan and others dedicated themselves to the task of engaging every parishioner, clergy, lay leaders, educational leaders, diocesan staff, ecumenical friends and those beyond the Church to reflect together on Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, ***Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel*** and its implication and possible application across our Diocese. The Assembly was also inspired by the impetus of the Plenary Council which will gather for its first session this October and will, through dialogue, prayer and discernment, articulate future directions for the Catholic Church across Australia. The Diocesan Assembly remains a rich gift for us and a guide for our future direction.

The reflections of the Diocesan Assembly were collated in a document **Ideas for Pastoral Initiatives submitted by the Assembly**. This document **gathered** the raw responses from the hundreds of participants who assembled at Marist-Sion College in September 2019. These reflections both affirm the experience of many in our parishes, and at the same time, articulate a sense of mission for the future. These pastoral initiatives are not restrictive, but can be applied across the diversity of our communities and enacted as discerned by each parish community. They also assist in determining how diocesan resources and initiatives may serve our parishes as we set out on this journey as contemporary missionary disciples.

So, let us set our course anew!

While Covid-19 may have interrupted the journey and set us off course, let us come together once more and take up the task before us. Let us discern our way forward through the lens of faith. Covid-19 disrupted our lives; however, it proved how resilient, imaginative, creative, caring, compassionate and faithful our parish communities are.

In light of the Pentecost message, and as you gather in your parishes at your formal pastoral meetings, or informal gatherings, we have the opportunity to reflect. Perhaps the questions below may help as you list your responses to the following:

- What did we learn about our parish community because of Covid-19?
- What pastoral initiatives emerged at our parish which should not be lost?
- What could we have done differently and how might we move forward?

The Diocesan Assembly has provided a rich compass for the journey ahead for every parish and also provides direction for the journey ahead in our Diocese. Upon this foundation, we listen to the voice of the Plenary Council. I invite you to use the Assembly's pastoral ideas in a spirit of gentle discernment and dialogue by taking your time together, listening to one another, praying with one another so as to identify those pastoral initiatives which you will work toward.

Our Assembly provides pastoral priorities: Faith Formation and Spirituality; Leadership and Governance; Families and Vocation; Liturgy and Prayer; and, The Welcoming Community. Each of these fundamental aspects of Church life underpin who we are and who we are called to be, and invite us to consider our response from both a parish and diocesan perspective.

The Diocesan *Gaudium et Spes* Plenary Committee continues to gather, reflect and to discern our shared journey together. Their inspirational thoughts, pastoral experience and collective faith assist in steering the pastoral course of our Diocese.

I am most thankful to each member for their zeal, honesty, challenge, hope, purpose, pastoral wisdom and deep sense of what is possible in inspiring, forming, promoting and encouraging our Diocesan unity and sense of shared mission.

I invite every parish council, leadership team and parish group to be given access to the Assembly document. I ask our priests and parish leaders to embrace this pastoral initiative as a means of enhancing local communities, setting objectives and encouraging a common purpose which will resound across our beautiful diocese from its mountains, valleys, towns and urban parishes. Use this document as part of your meetings: explore, unpack, identify and discern at least two pastoral initiatives which you will enact in a deliberate and intentional way.

Allow it to steer your thinking, your efforts and your outreach to those beyond. Invite your community to reflect upon their baptismal gifts and encourage in each member of the parish a desire to offer these in their shared mission.

The document can be accessed here:

www.cdsale.org.au/ideas-for-pastoral-initiatives

The Feast of Pentecost speaks to us of a beauty ever ancient, ever new. May we listen to the “current of the sea” through our prayer, our reflection and our discernment of the Spirit of God alive among us. Let us embark together across the Diocese of Sale honouring the rich story of our faith, trusting in the presence of the Risen Christ who has transformed forever our hopes and fears in the Divine life of God, and whose Spirit breathes upon the seas, bringing us to fullness of life.

O GOD, WHO BY THE MYSTERY OF TODAY'S GREAT FEAST
SANCTIFY YOUR WHOLE CHURCH IN EVERY PEOPLE AND NATION,
POUR OUT, WE PRAY, THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
ACROSS THE FACE OF THE EARTH,
AND, WITH THE DIVINE GRACE THAT WAS AT WORK
WHEN THE GOSPEL WAS FIRST PROCLAIMED,
FILL NOW ONCE MORE THE HEARTS OF BELIEVERS.

COLLECT- PENTECOST SUNDAY



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Bishop Greg Bennet

Feast of Pentecost 2021

If parishes have a pastoral initiative they would like to celebrate or share with other parishes across the Diocese, please provide a brief summary to the Gaudium et Spes group and if possible, a photo to **Sophy Morley** (smorley@sale.catholic.org.au) who will assist in disseminating our shared endeavours.